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Barriers & Incentives to Obtaining a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing

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Thesis

A Paper Presented to Meet Partial Requirements

For NRSG-598

Thesis

Southern Adventist University

School of Nursing

Introduction

Nurses with a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) have many career opportunities and research has also found that patients cared for by BSN nurses have decreased mortality rates (Lippman, 2003). Nurses who begin their nursing career with a BSN as their initial education level are four times more likely to pursue a graduate degree in nursing than those nurses who start their nursing career with a Diploma in Nursing or Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN) (Raines & Taglaireni, 2008). Currently, nurses prepared with a diploma, ASN, or BSN receive the same salary despite the fact that a BSN prepared nurse has more education. A BSN degree allows more mobility through career ladders and more challenging positions, such as nurse managers.

The National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice recommend increasing the percent of BSN prepared nurses in the workforce to at least 2/3 by 2010 (Graf, 2006). In 2006 with approximately 2.4 million nurses in the workforce only 31% received their initial education as a BSN (Raines & Taglaireni, 2008). Associate degree nurses and diploma nurses accounted for 51.2% of the registered nurse (RN) workforce (Warren & Mills, 2009).

Warren & Mills (2009) found that offering organizational incentives encouraged nurses to pursue a BSN or higher degree. Family responsibilities, lack of money, and older age were some of the identified barriers.

Problem Statement, Research Purpose, and Hypothesis

There is a lack of nurses pursuing a BSN (Warren & Mills, 2009). Patients cared for by BSN nurses have decreased mortality rates. BSN nurses also have more mobility through career ladders. It is important to understand the barriers that prevent nurses from pursuing a BSN and the incentives that could be offered to encourage nurses to pursue a BSN.

The purpose of this study is to examine barriers and incentives that prevent or encourage nurses in the Chattanooga area from pursuing a BSN. This study will help to determine what may be used to motivate nurses to return to school for a BSN. This information may help to increase awareness of the barriers to a BSN and facilitate more student friendly recruitment processes.

Currently, in the Chattanooga area, most facilities do not compensate nurses for different degree levels. This study will attempt to determine if associate degree and diploma nurses would be more likely to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing if their wages in the workforce increased after obtaining the degree.

This study will also examine the barriers and incentives to obtaining a BSN. The hypotheses proposed are:

1. A nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if pay is increased.
2. A nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if it were more affordable.
3. A nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if his or her schedule is flexible enough to allow time to return to school.
4. A nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if not satisfied with current nursing position.

Definition of terms

For the purpose of this study the term nurse will be used to refer to registered nurses (RN) with any level of educational preparation, including but not limited to diploma, ASN, or BSN. The term diploma will describe the two year degree that is based in hospitals and provides education to practice as an RN. ASN will describe a two year college degree that provides basic education to practice as an RN. BSN will refer to a four year college degree that prepares one to

practice as a RN (Megginson, 2008). An RN-BSN degree is one in which the ASN or diploma RN receives further education to obtain their BSN.

Theoretical Framework

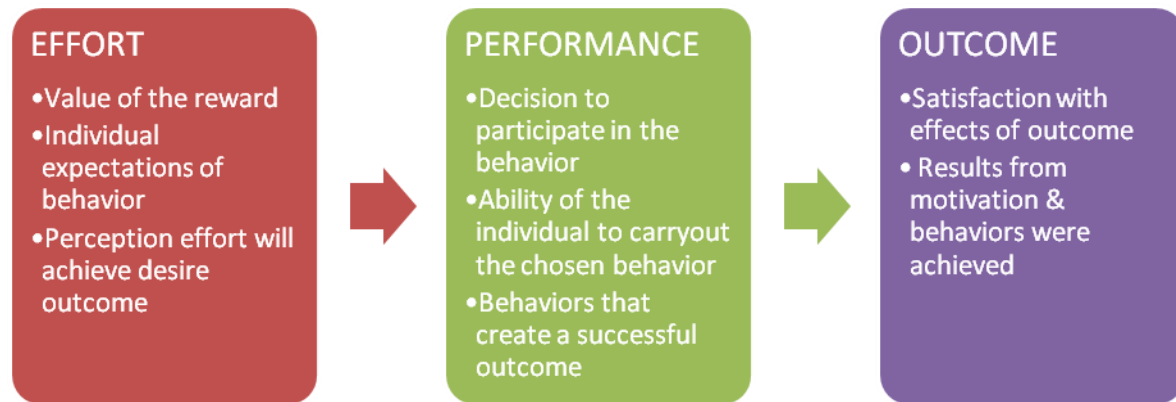


Figure 1 Conceptual model of an individual's motivation to pursue a desired outcome. This model is based on a similar model of individual performance in organizations from *Behaviors in Organizations* by Lyman W. Porter, Edward E. Lawler, III, and J. Richard Hackman (1975).

This research utilized The Expectancy Model by Lyman W. Porter and Edward E. Lawler, III (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975). The Expectancy Model provides a framework for examining human motivations and calculating the outcome based on an individual's personal choices. The Expectancy Model also considers the individual's expectations for chosen behaviors and how the individual's perception of the outcome affects his or her decision to participate in the behavior. The effects of the outcome result from the motivation that the individual has to employ the behavior. The Expectancy Model assumes that the behavior chosen by the individual is predictable if the individual's perception of the situation is known (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975).

The Expectancy Model helps to identify what may influence an individual's motivation to pursue an outcome. Porter, Lawler, and Hackman (1975) state that there are certain factors that shape an individual's perception. Each individual has his or her idea of what is important

and what is not. Each individual also has his or her beliefs about behaviors that will lead to the outcomes they want to achieve. The choice an individual makes is influenced by his or her expectations. Another factor that affects an individual's perception is how he or she feels about the situation and his or her desire for the outcome to occur. The individual must also be willing to put forth the effort and have the capability to perform the needed behavior in order to achieve the outcome. (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975).

This study examined the effects of specific barriers and incentives on an individual's decision to pursue a BSN. This study used the framework of The Expectancy Model to support the premise that there may be factors that lead to or detract from the pursual of a BSN (Figure 1). The factors that will be studied are a salary increase, cost of education, time, current career goals, and the individual's perception of pursuing a BSN. Porter and Lawler's Expectancy Model supports the premise that the individual effort to pursue a BSN is influenced by the individual's feeling about the behavior needed to achieve the outcome in relationship to the value of the outcome. If the desired outcome is important to the individual, then he or she will be more likely to perform the behavior and benefit from the outcome. If the individual perceives positive rewards after obtaining a BSN, such as a salary increase, promotion at work, or job satisfaction will he or she be more likely to return to school and less likely to be influenced by the barriers that are perceived?

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumes that the subjects sampled completed the survey truthfully. Another assumption considered is that the instrument used is reliable. Limitations of the study include the sample size is limited to two hospitals and preconceived notions that most nurses do not pursue a BSN unless they intend to pursue another advanced degree.

Review of Literature

There is a paucity of research that studied the effects of a wage differential for a BSN. Currently in many areas there is no difference in wages for with a diploma, ASN, or BSN degree practicing in the same position.

Warren and Mills (2009) conducted a study to determine what incentives motivate nurses to pursue an advanced practice degree. Warren and Mills study sought to discover methods that could be used to increase the number of nurses with an advanced degree. Only 19.4% of nurses in the study planned to pursue advanced education, but that nurses' willingness to return to school increased if the right incentives were offered. Barriers to education included: older age, family, and money. Incentives included: "pay to attend class, classes offered at work site, tuition reimbursement, match work and class hours, paid sabbatical, forgivable loans for service, and web-based classes" (p. 204). Warren and Mills also found that if nurses were satisfied with their current career they were less likely to be motivated to return for an advanced degree. If job satisfaction or income were perceived as low and the nurses believed that an advanced degree would offer them more opportunities then they were more likely to enroll in an educational program (career satisfaction = 0.137, $p < .05$). Warren and Mills determined that if an organization addressed the barriers and offered incentives that more nurses would pursue an advanced degree.

Mennemeyer and Gaumer (1983) examined whether higher education and credentials draw a premium wage in the marketplace. Mennemeyer and Gaumer took into account years of experience and job requirements and found only small premiums for BSN. Mennemeyer and Gaumer went on to state that those that held master's degrees were compensated in certain areas

and that neither nurses nor their employers would benefit from a required entry baccalaureate degree that has been proposed.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching supports a BSN as the entry-level degree for nurses. Patricia Benner, director of the Carnegie study, supports this change and feels that it would prepare more nurses for advanced degree. On the other side of this debate, the National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing states that a BSN should not be required for nurses and that continuing education should not be a requirement (Moltz, 2010). Moltz proposed that differentiation in nurses' wages for the degree they held would increase the number of BSN prepared nurses thus eliminating the need for this debate.

The number of ASN degrees will increase more quickly than the number of BSN. Graf (2006) conducted a study concerning the monetary benefits for nurses who pursue a BSN after their ASN. Graf found that the wage benefits received for completing a BSN are offset by the educational expenses acquired. Graf proposes that an increase in wages would increase the number of nurses completing their BSN. This increase would make it more valuable for those with an ASN to obtain a BSN both financially and professionally.

Lowry's (1992) study determined the costs and benefits of BSN and RN-BSN degrees from the students' perspective. This study found that pursuing a BSN over the RN-BSN degree was a better investment and more economically beneficial to the student. The student usually graduated at a younger age, had longer to work, and had more opportunities to advance in their career.

A qualitative study by Megginson (2008) examined what RN-BSN nursing students viewed as incentives and barriers to obtaining a BSN. Incentives included: being at the right time of life, accomplishing a personal goal, more credibility and options at work, and more

flexible programs available. Barriers included: lack of time, fear, not enough recognition for a BSN, equal treatment for diploma, ASN, and BSN nurses, and bad past experiences in nursing school.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This is a quantitative non-experimental descriptive study. The study investigated the possible relationships among a nurse's willingness to pursue a BSN and pay increase, affordability, flexibility of schedule, and career satisfaction.

Sample and Setting

Nurses at two major facilities in the greater Chattanooga area were given the opportunity to participate in the study. Criteria included participants who have current active registered nurse license, an associate degree or diploma in nursing, and are actively employed in the two designated hospitals in the greater Chattanooga area. Criteria excluded participants who have a BSN degree or those who are not actively employed in a nursing position.

Ethics

Permission was obtained to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board at Southern Adventist University. Two local hospitals were asked for permission to perform the study at their facility. All participation in the study was voluntary and written directions were attached to the questionnaire for the participant to read. Completion of the questionnaire by the participant acknowledged consent. There was no compensation offered for participation. No identifying data was used in the study result (see Appendix A for informed consent).

There is no physical harm to the participants and little if any psychological or social harm to the participants of the study. The information obtained is useful not only to nursing schools,

but to hospitals and other facilities as well. It may also make the participant more aware of his/her own reason for pursuing a BSN degree.

Instrumentation

This study used a four point forced choice scale questionnaire developed by the researchers for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire contained eight statements that the participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statements. All questionnaires were scored and the data was prepped for analysis with the SPSS 17.0 software (see Appendix B for questionnaire used).

Procedures for Data Collection

All participants who met the criteria and were willing to complete the questionnaire were utilized. The questionnaire was distributed at two local hospitals. The participants were asked to complete and return the questionnaire. Explanation of the study and instructions for completing the survey was discussed. Participation was anonymous and privacy was upheld. Data collection was halted after 50 questionnaires were collected. The data was then secured and prepared for analysis.

Plan for Analysis

Data were analyzed after all specified procedures for distributing and collecting the questionnaires have been performed. Data analysis was completed using SPSS 17.0 software to identify statistically significant data. Data were analyzed first using participants' age, gender, and years as a nurse following The Expectancy Model as the framework. The survey questions were coded and entered into the SPSS software. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis to predict the effect of the independent variables on the perceived identified incentives and barriers to pursuing a BS degree.

Dissemination of Findings

The findings of this study will be presented to Southern Adventist University School of Nursing faculty and students, and other interested entities. Printouts of the study and PowerPoint presentations will be given to all facilities' human resources and nursing managers.

Data Analysis

Demographic Data

Of the 53 RNs sampled, 26.4% (14) were age 20-29 years old, 22.6% (12) were 30-39 years old, 18.9% (10) were 40-49 years old, 24.5% (13) were 50-59 years old, and 7.5% (4) were age 60 years or older. Eighty-one percent (43) of the subjects were female. The majority of subjects had earned an associate's degree, 92.5% (49). Over half of the subjects had either 1-5 years of experience or greater than 15 years of experience. Each of these categories comprised 34% (18) of the total subjects sampled.

Instrument Reliability

Internal consistency of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's alpha. A score of 0.346 was found testing questions one through eight, which indicates fair internal consistency. Numbers close to 1.00 are considered very good internal consistency and numbers close to 0.00 are considered poor internal consistency.

Analysis of Results

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the barriers and incentives that affect an RNs motivation to pursue a BSN. A significant regression equation was found, where P is significant at greater than 0.05. The R^2 found that 65.4% of the variation in the participant's motivation to pursue a BSN can be explained by the barriers and incentives analyzed. Participant's motivation to pursue a BSN is identified using question one, where likert scores are

coded as strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. Participant's likert scores increased 0.64855 for each barrier and incentive that affected their pursual of a BSN (Figure 2). Questions three through seven were significant predictors. Question two was not significant.

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.097	.702		1.562	.125
Q2	.683	.113	.634	6.067	.000
Q3	-.002	.102	-.002	-.024	.981
Q4	.189	.114	.176	1.649	.106
Q5	.001	.138	.001	.005	.996
Q6	-.060	.144	-.046	-.417	.679
Q7	-.155	.112	-.139	-1.382	.174

a. Dependent Variable: Q1

Figure 2 Regression coefficients calculated by SPSS Version 17.0

Questions three and five were found to be the most significant. Question three had a significant level of 0.981 and question five had a significant level of 0.996. Question four was found to be significant with a level of 0.106. Of the 53 participants surveyed, 67.9% have considered pursuing a BSN. Question three revealed that over half of the participants, 51.9% (27) strongly agreed or agreed that there were no incentives that would encourage them to pursue a BSN. Question five showed that 69.8% (37) of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they could not afford to go back to school. Question four found that 77.3% (41) of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they would pursue a BSN if they received more pay than those with less education (Figure 3).

Questions six and seven were also found to be significant. Question six had a significant level of 0.679 and question seven had a significant level of 0.174. Greater than half of the participants were not happy with their current position in nursing, 56.6% (30), but felt that their schedule was not flexible enough to pursue a BSN, 58.5% (31).

Rating Scale:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have seriously considered pursuing a bachelor's of science in nursing degree (BSN).	4	3	2	1
2. A BSN degree would be beneficial to my career.	4	3	2	1
3. There are no incentives that would encourage me to pursue a BSN.	4	3	2	1
4. I would be willing to pursue a BSN degree if I would receive more pay than those with less education.	4	3	2	1
5. I cannot afford to go back to school at this time.	4	3	2	1
6. My schedule is not flexible enough to allow me to attend school at this time.	4	3	2	1
7. I am happy with my current position in nursing and do not feel a need for change at this time.	4	3	2	1
8. I plan to pursue a bachelor's of science in nursing degree in the next year.	4	3	2	1

Figure 3 Copy of survey used.

The proposed hypotheses were examined using questions four through seven. All hypotheses were supported by the data collected. The hypothesis that stated a nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if pay is increased was supported ($r = .654$, $p = .106$, $p > .05$). The hypothesis that a nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if it were more affordable was supported that 69.8% of nurses agreed that they could not afford to pursue a BSN. The hypothesis that a nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if his or her schedule is flexible enough to allow time to return to school was supported that 58.5% of nurses felt that their schedule was not flexible

enough to pursue a BSN. The hypothesis that a nurse is more willing to pursue a BSN if not satisfied with current nursing position found that 56.6% of the nurses surveyed were not satisfied with their current nursing position.

Discussion of Results

This study found that the major barrier to pursuing a BSN was money. Most participants felt that they could not afford to return to school, but would be more willing to return if they received more compensation for earning a BSN. The participants' motivation to pursue a BSN was inhibited more by barriers. The potential incentives to pursue a BSN were not as important. The majority (56.6%) of participants were not happy with their current position in nursing and 37.7% planned to pursue a BSN in the next year.

The findings in this study were consistent with a previous study done by Megginson (2008) that found no differentiation in pay and no time to return to school were barriers. In contrast with this study, Megginson (2008) found that a lack of confidence and a previous negative nursing school experience were also barriers. Incentives examined were being at the right time in life, having a personal goal to achieve a BSN, and user friendly educational programs (Megginson, 2008). Despite many of the surveyed participants reporting dissatisfaction with their current nursing position, there were not many who planned to pursue a BSN. Warren & Mills (2009) found that increased career satisfaction showed a decrease in motivation to return to school and that those RNs who were less satisfied with their career were more likely to pursue a BSN if they were offered organizational incentives.

The age and years of experience varied greatly among the participants. However, this study was limited by the sample size and the limited time frame in which the data were collected.

Furthermore, this study did not consider the socioeconomic or ethnic background of the participants.

Recommendations

Additional research is needed to further evaluate the barriers and incentives for pursuing a BSN. A qualitative study examining the personal perceptions of a BSN and specific barriers and incentives may also be beneficial. A larger sample size and sample area would have been beneficial to the current study. This would allow the researcher to see if geographic location influences the pursuit of a BSN. Other factors to consider in this study would be to examine age versus desire to pursue a BSN or experience versus desire to pursue a BSN. Are younger RNs with less experience more likely to pursue a BSN than older RNs who have been practicing for years?

Conclusions

Currently a BSN may offer advancement in the nursing field leading to management positions, but allows for no differentiation in pay among staff nurses. A BSN also allows nurses to pursue advanced practice degrees. There is an increase in safety and a decrease in morbidities when patients are cared for by a BSN prepared nurse.

Of the RNs surveyed, most have considered pursuing a BSN yet have no plans of doing so despite not being satisfied with their current position in nursing. Cost of education was the biggest factor that prevents RNs from pursuing a BSN. Increased compensation would encourage more nurses to pursue a BSN, however most nurses do not feel that their schedule is flexible enough to return to school at this time.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

We are interested in and seek your cooperation in participating in a study investigating the barriers and incentives to obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing.

If you agree to participate, you will complete an eight question survey. You will not use your name on any documents. Completion of the questionnaire after reading this form will acknowledge consent. The information collected is for research purposes and any information you give us will be kept confidential.

Although all studies have some degree of risk, the potential in this investigation is quite minimal. All information you provide will be handled confidentially. You will not incur any costs as a result of your participation in this study and no compensation is rewarded for participation.

Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this study simply do not return the attached questionnaire without fear of prejudice.

If you have any questions prior to your participation in this activity or at any time during the study please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you,

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Appendix B

Please circle only one answer per category.

Age	Gender	Current nursing degree	Number of years as a nurse
20-29 yrs	Male	Associate's	Less than 1yr
30-39 yrs	Female	Diploma	1-5 yrs
40-49 yrs			6-10 yrs
50-59 yrs			11-15 yrs
60 and older			Greater than 15 yrs

Rating Scale:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have seriously considered pursuing a bachelor's of science in nursing degree (BSN).	4	3	2	1
2. A BSN degree would be beneficial to my career.	4	3	2	1
3. There are no incentives that would encourage me to pursue a BSN.	4	3	2	1
4. I would be willing to pursue a BSN degree if I would receive more pay than those with less education.	4	3	2	1
5. I cannot afford to go back to school at this time.	4	3	2	1
6. My schedule is not flexible enough to allow me to attend school at this time.	4	3	2	1
7. I am happy with my current position in nursing and do not feel a need for change at this time.	4	3	2	1
8. I plan to pursue a bachelor's of science in nursing degree in the next year.	4	3	2	1